12:Tantaquidgeon E-5 (no date)1950 NM7 Delaware NM7

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# Delaware Indian Art Designs

GLADYS TANTAQUIDGEON

## Introduction

101 The Delawares belong to the Algonkian linguistic stock. When referring to themselves they use the term Lenape or Lenni Lenape, which denotes "real" or "native men." The original 131 habitat of the Delawares was in southeastern New York, eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. In this territory they were first visited by the Dutch, 648 Swedish and English voyagers in the 16th 175 and 17th centuries. About 1720, trouble began owing in part to pressure brought upon the Delawares by the Iroquois. This marked the beginning of a series of 167 migrations in which bands of Delawares 175 left their ancestral homes in the east and moved westward. Their first move took them to the valley of the Susquehanna, where they settled at Wyoming about 1742. By 1751 they had reached eastern Ohio and formed settlements. Another move brought numbers of them into Indiana. In 1789 they were granted permission by the Spanish government to settle in Missouri and Arkansas. Later most of the tribe was brought together on a reservation

[P.24, A]

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## Introduction

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175

in Kansas, and from there they moved to Oklahoma and became incorporated with the Cherokee. Other bands found their way to Canada in the Province of Ontario, where they are now known as Delawares, Munsee and Moravians.

161

The present population of the Delawares is estimated to be about 1,400. Of this number, 1,000 are in Oklahoma and the remainder in the province of Ontario, Canada.

## Field of Art

53
32
178
285

Until about 1890 the Delawares practiced many of their native arts and crafts but among the modern descendants of the tribe only a few of the older arts have survived. Pottery making, work in stone, bone, horn, antler, silver and the use of quills and hair in embroidery; twined basketry made from certain roots, and woven bags and girdles of Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabium*) are now only vaguely remembered by some of the older members of the groups in Oklahoma and Ontario. Work in silver persisted until

[824]

[326]

[P.24,B] About 1913.

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463 about 1913. The Delaware women and a few men are yet skilled workers in beads, 531 both in sewed-on designs and in bead weaving. The women are expert in the art of working out intricate designs in ribbon applique on robes, leggings, breech cloths and moccasins. Some wood carving is also 322 done by the modern Delawares and a few 285 make splint baskets.

## Designs and Symbolism

531 In the study of Delaware art motifs we find that they fall into two groups. In group A are the ancient earth symbols, floral and geometric (angular) patterns; in group B, the religious symbols of the Peyote Cult. This is a religious teaching and ceremony that arose in the tribe about 50 years ago. Animal and human figures [172] rarely occur in Delaware art. In archeological finds, representations of the human face in stone frequently occur but those are said to have been the charms owned and worn by certain individuals who had dreamed of the mask spirit and had the right to use its likeness as representative of the great spiritual force or guardian spirit. [787] If a person saw an animal during his dream quest he would have the right to use the likeness of that particular animal on his [614] wearing apparel. It is also permissible to have representations of clan animal totems on one's vest or tobacco pouch.

The earth symbols and the "trails" shown in plate 1 are said to be ancient, as well as figures A and B called "clasps" in plate 2. The earth symbols in plate 1 illustrate the [821] native Delaware belief that the earth rests on the back of a tortoise and that the sun in its daily round goes under the tortoise and comes up on the opposite side the next day. Figure C, plate 1, symbolizes the power of the Creator which is felt in the four corners of the earth. These symbols [171] occur in the ancient art designs of other Algonkian peoples in northeastern North America from Labrador to southern New England. Floral patterns for moccasin tops or vamps, breech cloths, robes and bags fall into this grouping (plates 3 and 4).

[P. 25, A]

531 also the angular patterns in plate 1 which are used in ribbon applique. The floral [751] patterns are protective, representing the plants which the Creator gave to mankind to cure diseases. It will be noted (plate 3) [291] that the patterns for women's moccasin vamps are plain and narrow in contrast to the wider patterns for men's moccasins.

## Techniques

The bead workers and silk ribbon-workers have series of cut-out paper patterns which they use as guides. Typical patterns are shown in plates 1, 3 and 4. In making bead designs the paper pattern is cut out and tacked with thread in position on the article to be decorated. The entire pattern is outlined with white or light colored beads such as blue or pale yellow. The middle portion of the figure is then filled in and in turn bordered with light-colored beads. Then rows of dark beads are filled in to suit the taste of the individual. The paper patterns for silk-work are laid on the ribbon or cloth and the cut-out silk figures are arranged in place on the legging-strips or robes and hemmed down, the stitches being very fine.

286 In weaving the belts, headbands, garters and other ornaments, wool is used for the warp and coarse thread for the weft. Sometimes in constructing the long sashes, which frequently average five feet, the warp strands are attached to a bed post and the worker sits on the bed and weaves. For the shorter articles a cardboard box serves as a loom across which the warp is arranged according to the width desired. This is held on the lap of the weaver.

531 The modern Delaware bead and silk ribbon-workers do not limit the use of colors in their art work but select carefully, and combine a number of colors with very pleasing results.

Geometric and highly conventionalized floral patterns were stamped or engraved on silver brooches, bracelets and other ornaments. Dots, circles, straight and curved lines were used in combinations to form the designs. Small buttons and

[P.25, B]

Small buttons and
531 brooches ranging from ½ to ¾ of an inch
[291] in diameter were used in decorating the capes on women's over-waists. These capes were made to fall over the shoulders covering the upper arm. The silver buttons and brooches were arranged in various patterns sometimes covering the entire cape or collar. Several very old specimens are now extant in private and museum collections.

531 The use of Peyote[1] for ceremonial and
795 medicinal purposes was introduced among
[278 the Delawares about 1880. With the
177] growth of this religious creed a new

[P.26, A]

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sybmolism in art motifs has developed among its followers. Ceremonial wands, prayer staffs and feather fans as well as headbands, arm bands, belts and garters bear geometric figures done in beads (woven or sewed on) symbolizing the Peyote or cactus "button," mind, sky, water, fire and sun's rays. (Typical Peyote designs in plate 1.)

[278] (1) A small species of cactus (**Lophophora Williamsii**) used for ceremonial and religious purposes by certain groups in all tribes between the Rocky Mountains and the Gulf of Mexico, from the Arkansas River southward almost to the City of Mexico. (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bull. 30, **Handbook of American Indians**, Washington, 1910.)

[P. 26, B]

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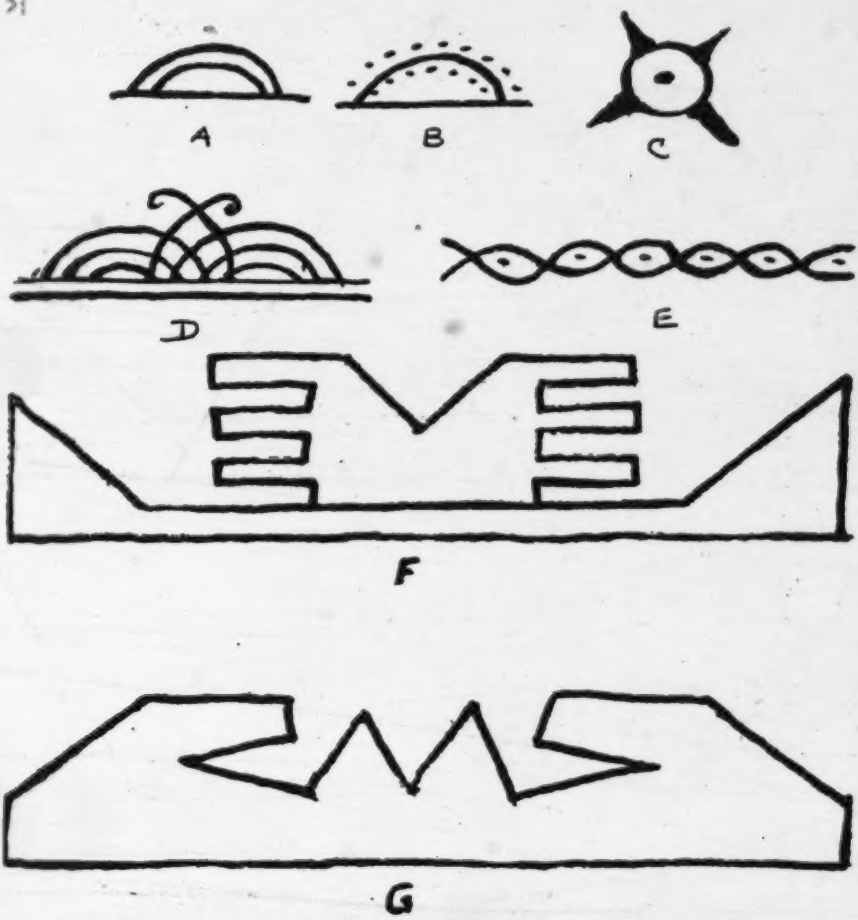


PLATE 1

Cut-out patterns in silk work for leggings and robes

[P.27]

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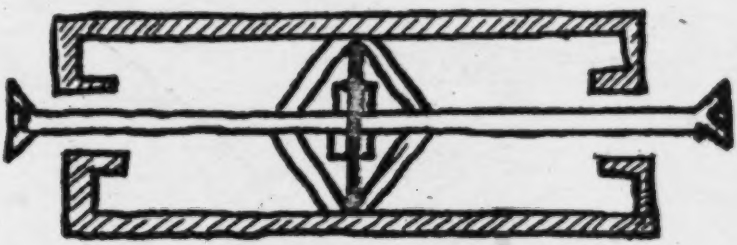
A



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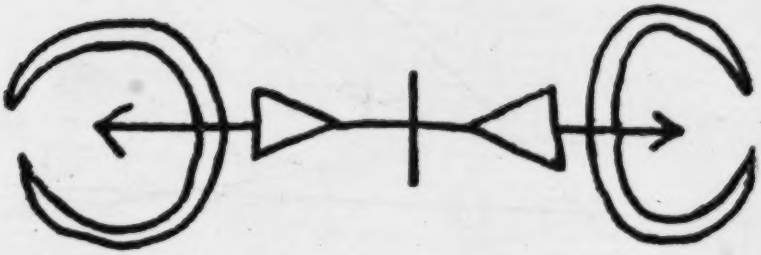
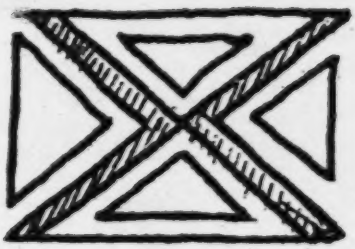


[795]
[202]



C

D

PLATE 2

A, B—Old designs in woven beadwork representing "clasps."
C—Peyote ceremony design representing "to be in good associations."
D—Meaning "Safe now, danger is past."

[P.28]

531

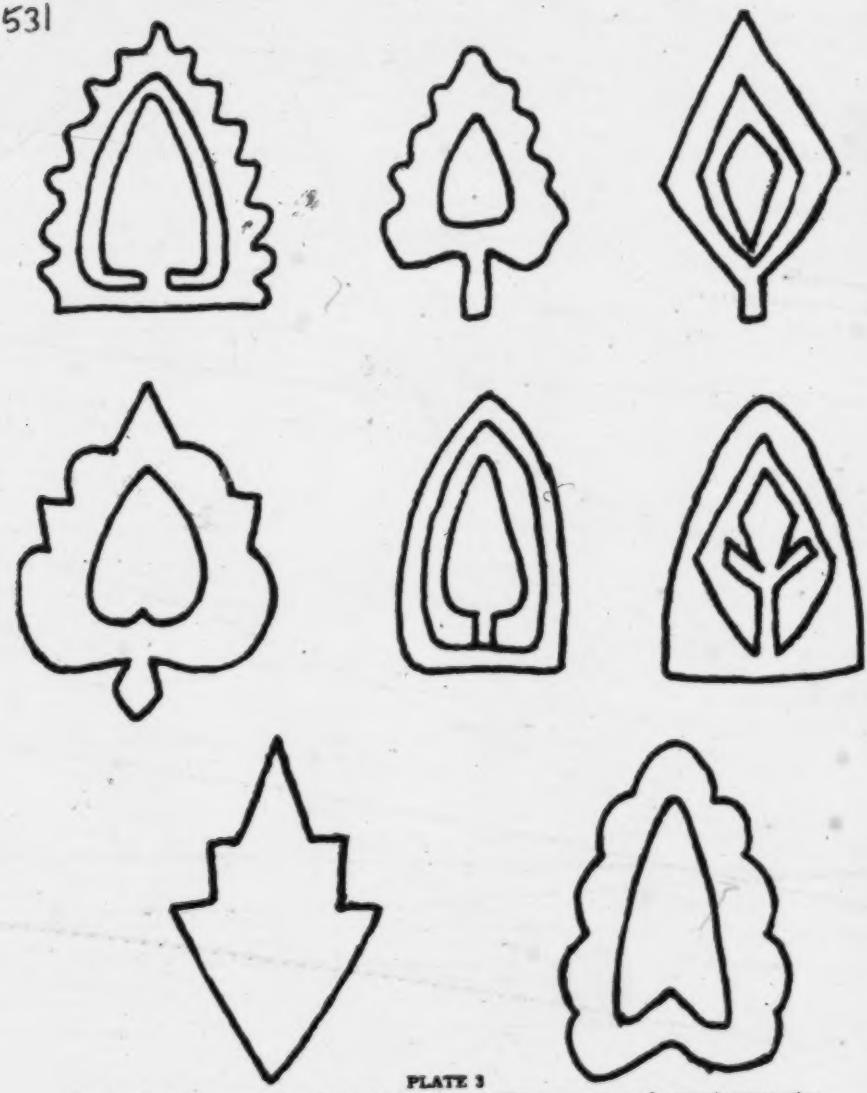


PLATE 3

Toe designs for moccasins derived from leaves. [Two upper rows for men's moccasins, lower row for womens.'] All in beadwork.

[P. 29]

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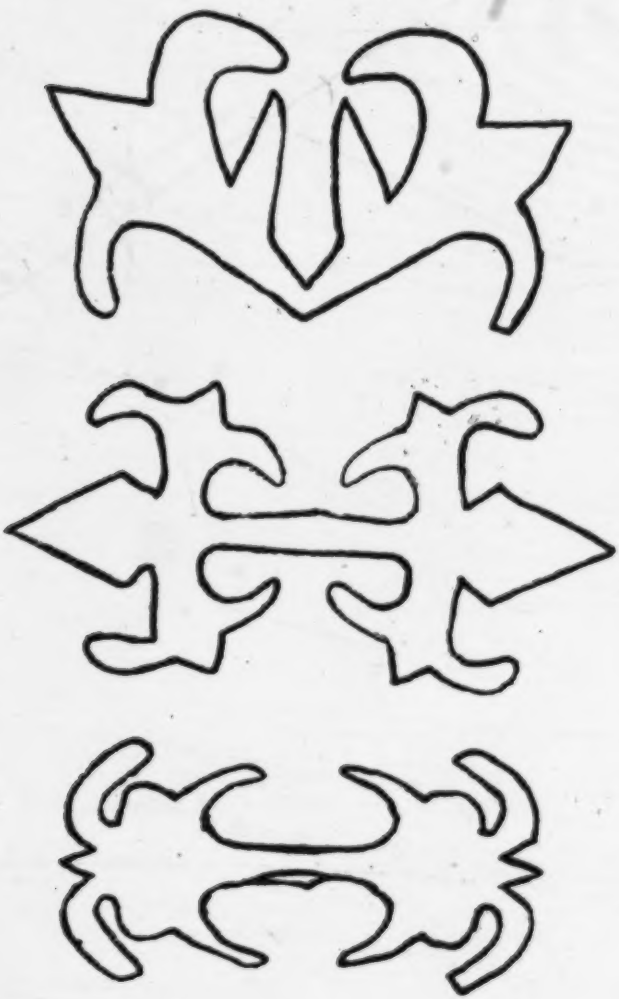

PLATE 4

Bead and silk work designs representing "flower" and "plants," reproduced on breechcloths, leggings, blankets, pouches.

[P.30]